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# *The Letort Papers*

JOINT U.S. ARMY-NAVY WAR PLANNING  
ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR:  
ITS ORIGINS AND ITS LEGACY

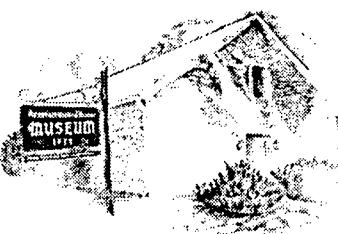
Colonel Adolf Carlson

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U.S. Army War College



## The Letort Papers



In the early 18th century, James Letort, an explorer and fur trader, was instrumental in opening up the Cumberland Valley to settlement. By 1753, there was a garrison on Letort Creek at what is today Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. In those days, Carlisle Barracks lay at the western edge of the American colonies. It was a bastion for the protection of settlers and a departure point for further exploration. Today, as was the case over two centuries ago, Carlisle Barracks, as the home of the U.S. Army War College, is a place of transition and transformation.

In the same spirit of bold curiosity that compelled the men and women who, like Letort, settled the American west, the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is undertaking a new series of publications to be called *The Letort Papers*. This series will allow SSI to publish those research papers, historical retrospectives, speeches or essays that are of interest to the defense academic community but which may not exactly correspond to our usual policy-oriented publications focused on issues of strategic interest to the Army and the nation.

If you think you may have a subject amenable to publication in our *Letort Papers* series, or if you wish to comment on a particular paper, please contact Dr. Earl H. Tilford, Jr., Director of Research, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 17013. The phone number is (717) 245-4086/DSN 242-4086. We look forward to hearing from you.

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**JOINT U.S. ARMY-NAVY WAR PLANNING  
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ITS ORIGINS AND ITS LEGACY**

**Colonel Adolf Carlson**

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## FOREWORD

In a February 1997 speech, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili expressed the following thought:

... with all of the talk about today's dangerous world and the difficulties Americans have faced, it is too easy to overlook the fact that today the United States and its Allies are much safer than they were in the dark days of the Cold War. This "strategic pause," where the United States has no adversaries who are global powers, is providing us with the time to regroup, reflect on the challenges ahead, and prepare America's forces for the next millennium.

The paper which follows suggests that as we reflect on the challenges ahead, we may gain some insight by casting light on the challenges of the past. It is written in the spirit of the wisdom of Patrick Henry, who in 1775 said, "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know no way of judging of the future but by the past." For like the turn of the coming century, the turn of the last century was characterized by a strategic pause as well. As the British writer H. G. Wells observed in 1914, "Nothing could have been more obvious to the people of the early 20th century than the rapidity with which war was becoming impossible," words which seem strange to us today as we look back on the most warlike of centuries to date. While civilization hopes that the human race has outgrown its warrior nature, there are no guarantees that the 21st century will be less violent than the 20th.

What Wells said about people in general was perhaps more specifically true for his American contemporaries. Yet, within the United States War and Navy Departments, there were individuals who were concerned about the nation's security, even though Americans as a society had no urgent awareness that their security was in any way imperiled. This paper traces the development of U.S. strategic appreciations, and the planning that went along with them

in the years prior to the American entry into the First World War. In its conclusions, the paper will endeavor to demonstrate the ways in which the challenges faced by that generation of Americans were similar to the ones we face today.

*Richard H. Witherspoon*  
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# JOINT U.S. ARMY-NAVY WAR PLANNING ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR: ITS ORIGINS AND ITS LEGACY

## **Introduction.**

All the histories of the First World War devote considerable attention to the impact of war plans and war planners—how in the foreign relations among the great powers war plans became factors in their own right. Many of these plans revealed volumes about the attitudes of the officers who wrote them, from the *offensive a l'outrance* of French plan XVII (“even the customs officials attack”<sup>1</sup>) to the cold calculation of the Schlieffen plan, which called for the invasion of an unoffensive neutral country to achieve a military advantage.

Americans usually exclude themselves when they discuss the pre-war military plans, but there were U.S. war plans in 1914. How these plans were developed, and their impact on the development of American strategic thought will be the theme of this paper, revealing a United States less militarily naive than commonly thought and suggesting insights relevant to U.S. strategy on the eve of the next century.

## **Background.**

The history of the looming hostility between the United States and European powers in the years prior to World War I has long roots. As early as the American Civil War, the United States was collecting intelligence on the European powers. For example, the National Archives contains an intriguing document from President Lincoln’s papers labeled “Tables of Comparative Power of American and European Navy Rifled Ordnance.” This chart, clearly derived from covert intelligence, consists of comparisons of the characteristics of rifled cannon made in Prussia, England, France, Italy, and America.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, secret

testimony before the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War in 1865 stated that "We have in this country more powerful rifled cannon than any we know of abroad," a conclusion reached after at least one secret inspection of the Krupp works in Germany during the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> Further, in a February 1864 Senate hearing, Union Commodore John Rogers expressed the view that American weapons are the "best in the world," and revealed that Union ironclad ships were designed to rival British, and not Confederate, naval vessels.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the United States was taking the measure of the Europeans, European military observers were sizing up the Americans. These observers were particularly interested in American coastal fortifications. British observers concluded that "ships cannot contend with forts when conditions are anything like equal,"<sup>5</sup> and therefore to reduce a well-constructed fort it was necessary to land a force and establish siege batteries. The Prussian observer, Captain Justus Scheibert, reached similar conclusions based upon his observations of the defense of Charleston and his studies of joint operations on the Mississippi River. "A fleet," Scheibert wrote in a study he entitled *Zusammenwirken der Armee und Marine* (Collaboration of the Army and the Navy), "despite its mobility and clear superiority in both the caliber and quality . . . of its guns, was not equal to land batteries . . . if not supported by land forces."<sup>6</sup> The Swiss military observer, Major Ferdinand Lecompte, offered the view that while the amphibious landing in the Crimean War was regarded as almost "the eighth wonder of the world,"<sup>7</sup> the Union Army during the Civil War had conducted about 50 such landings "with superior skill and less fanfare."<sup>8</sup>

Although no one can say for sure whether these judgments deterred any hostile designs, during the Civil War there were distinct possibilities that war would break out between the United States and two European powers. The first was Britain. Beginning with the *Trent* affair, U.S./British relationships underwent severe strains, resulting in the dispatch of a force of British troops to Canada. Hostile feelings were aggravated by the British

refusal to stop building Confederate commerce raiders in British ports. After the summer of 1863, however, Britain perceived that the Confederates were not likely to win the war, and that after a Union victory the United States Army could easily seize Upper and Lower Canada. At this point tensions eased, and relations improved between the two countries.

The other country with which the United States could have gone to war was France. In 1859, Mexican conservatives had borrowed money from European banks to finance a civil war against the liberal faction led by Benito Juarez. When the liberals got the upper hand in 1861, Juarez refused to pay those debts, and as a result in 1862 the French emperor, Napoleon III, sent a 25,000 man force to Mexico. This was a direct challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, but Napoleon thought that the United States was too preoccupied with its own rebellion to do anything about it. The French scheme culminated in the installation of the Austrian Prince Maximillian as Mexican emperor in the spring of 1864.

After the end of the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson sent a force of 50,000 well-equipped, veteran troops under the command of General Sheridan to Brownsville, Texas. This force was not in the least daunted by the prospect of fighting 25,000 French troops in Mexico, but as it turned out they did not have to. In the summer of 1866, the Prussians defeated the Austrians at Königgratz, and Napoleon reasoned, correctly as it turned out, that France was next. Clearly, he could not afford to maintain a large force in Mexico, and the French garrison returned to France. Without French soldiers to prop up his throne, Maximillian could not defend it and, in 1867, the whole ill-conceived scheme ended with his execution, an inglorious end to the most serious challenge to the Monroe Doctrine until the Cuban missiles crisis a century later.

When the Mexicans executed Maximilian, the only significant justification for U.S. military preparedness died with him. In the years after the Civil War, Americans assumed that there was virtually no possibility of a war

with a foreign power. England, our traditional foe, might have had ambitions in the American hemisphere, but the fact that its possessions in British North America were vulnerable to U.S. invasion was viewed as a deterrent. France, or for that matter any other continental European power, did not have a big enough navy, and besides would not dare to send troops to the Americas because it would leave itself open to attack by its European rivals. The American military was reduced accordingly, to a navy suited to limited coastal defense, and an army tailored to the modest requirements of military occupation of the former confederacy (until 1877), restoring order in labor disputes, and fighting the western Indian tribes. The cooperative spirit between the Army and the Navy, which the European observers had admired during the Civil War, disappeared, as for over 30 years the Army cooperated more closely with the Department of the Interior, and the Navy with the Department of State.

Yet, even in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, developments were under way which would begin the chain of events that dominated American strategy in the first half of the 20th century. In the early 1860s, the process of German unification began. The wars against Denmark in 1864 and Austria in 1866 established Prussia as the leading German state, and the defeat of the Second French Empire in 1870 codified the union of the German nation under Prussian leadership. Previous U.S. relations with the German states had been cordial, if distant. Now, the newly unified German state's continental, if not global, ambitions held forth the prospect of conflict with the reunited United States.

On the other side of the world, the year 1867 was the first year of the reign of the Meiji emperor of Japan. This dynasty devoted its energies to the nation's modernization and the reversal of the unequal treaties with western powers. Japan placed a number of orders with British shipyards to build a modern navy and, under the direction of General Yamagata Arimoto, discarded the medieval samurai system to build a modern army based on European-style conscription.

Significant as they appear in retrospect, few Americans at the time could predict how these developments would threaten their country's security.

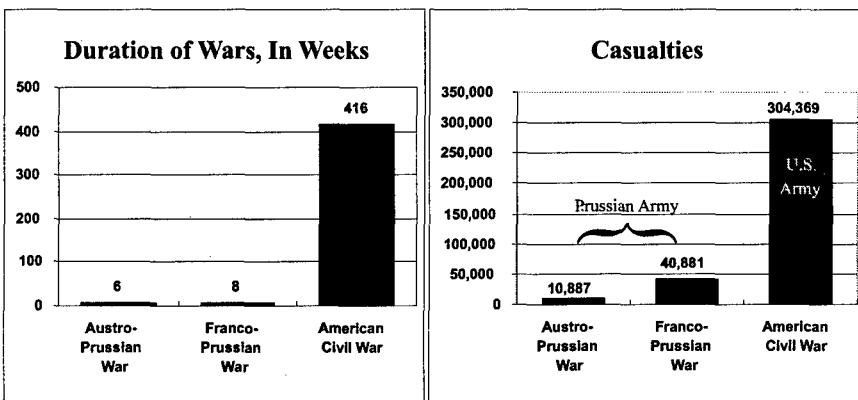
## Prophets in Their Own Land.

It would be incorrect to say, of course, that no Americans were interested in military developments in the post-Civil War years. During the Grant administration, largely at the initiative of the Army's Commanding General, William T. Sherman, American officers began a program of visits to Europe. Few of these officers went there with an open, inquisitive mind: their Civil War experience had produced a profound complacency. Typical was the report of General Phil Sheridan, who toured with the Prussian Field Marshall Moltke's headquarters during the Franco-Prussian War and reported back to President Grant that "there is nothing to be learned here professionally."<sup>9</sup> But in 1875, Sherman sent a much more astute observer: a West Point instructor, graduate of the class of 1861, and hero of the battle of Spottsylvania, named Emory Upton.

The orders Secretary of War Belknap sent to Upton must have seemed fantastic to the young veteran. He was to travel from West Point to San Francisco, and from there around the world to survey the world's armies. His report, completed in 1877, is a detailed assessment of the armies of Japan, China, India, Persia, Italy, Russia, Austria, Germany, France, and England.<sup>10</sup> Upton concluded with a number of recommendations which "we should adopt as indispensable to the vigorous, successful, and humane prosecution of our future wars."<sup>11</sup> These initiatives included universal military service, a strong regular army, a modern reserve system in lieu of the volunteer system of the Civil War, a "War Academy" to teach officers the art of war, and a general staff.<sup>12</sup> Upton based his conclusions on an analysis of cost, arguing that an efficient military establishment in peacetime, with trained armies and competent staffs, will reduce the wartime need for expensive mobilization and keep casualties to a minimum.<sup>13</sup>

Upton based much of his analysis on his analysis of the Wars of German Unification (Figure 1). In Upton's words:

Twenty thousand regular troops at Bull Run would have routed the insurgents, settled the question of military resistance, and relieved us from the pain and suspense of four years of war.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 1.**  
**Upton's Analysis, Illustrating that the Lack of a Strong Regular Army Was in Fact a False Economy.**

Unfortunately, these initiatives were at variance with American military tradition. Upton conceded that:

recognizing, in the fullest degree, that our present geographical isolation happily relieves us from the necessity of maintaining a large standing army, I have sought to present the best system to meet the demands of judicious economy in peace, and to avert unnecessary extravagance, disaster, and bloodshed in time of war.<sup>15</sup>

Sherman's comment on Upton's report, penciled on the cover, was that his ideas were sound, but:

I doubt if you will convince the powers that be . . . The time may not be now, but will come when these [conclusions] will be appreciated . . .<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, most of Upton's arguments were based upon his analysis of the Prussian victories over the Austrians and the French, but he also warned that:

Japan is no longer contented with progress at home [and] is destined to play an important part in the history of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Upton was transferred to the Presidio of San Francisco, where he developed what was probably a brain tumor. Tortured by the pain, he took his own life in 1881. The tragedy of Upton's death was that he believed that his life had been in vain and that his life's work would go forever unread.

During his life, Upton corresponded with other like-minded military reformers, among whom was Commodore Stephen B. Luce, USN. In the Civil War, Luce had commanded a Federal monitor, a part of a fleet trying to reduce the harbor defenses of Charleston. This was one of the most expensive and frustrating naval operations of the Civil War, because the Charleston defenses were well-constructed, and even when they were seriously damaged they were still strong enough to keep the Union navy at bay. When Sherman's army later took Charleston with ease from the landward side, Luce began to question the adequacy of the education of U.S. naval officers. Until that time naval officers learned little more than seamanship and gunnery, and nothing about naval strategy. As Luce put it, a naval officer should "not only know how to fight his own ship . . . he should have some idea of the principles of strategy."<sup>18</sup>

Luce's ideas were in keeping with prevailing American opinion about commerce and the government's responsibility to protect commerce, and unlike Upton, Luce found a supportive audience. He convinced the Navy Department to institute the Naval War College, in Newport RI, with himself installed as its first president. Luce then set out to find "that master mind who will lay the foundations of [naval] science, and do for it what Jomini has done for the military science."<sup>19</sup>

Luce found his man in Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, who in 1890, published one of the most influential books of its time, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*. Mahan argued that to realize its true greatness, the United States would have to change its continental orientation in favor of a global, maritime outlook. To do this with an acceptable degree of security, the navy would have to transform itself from a coastal defense force, augmented by commerce raiders, into an ocean-going force built around a fleet of capital ships. The size and capabilities of the fleet should be decided based upon the Royal Navy, the world's premier navy. These analyses at the Naval War College were the precursors of American peacetime war planning.

## **Opening Hostilities.**

Mahan's theories were based on the notion that maritime trade would lead countries into war. The first hint of that kind of war was an incident in 1889, which involved the United States in the risk of war in a distant place and against an unexpected foe. The place was Samoa. At the beginning of the 1880s, there were American and British coaling stations in Samoa along with a German-run coconut plantation. Bismarck's Germany had not been in competition for imperial colonies like other European nations, his famous line being that they were "not worth the bones of a Pomeranian grenadier."

In the year 1884, however, German policy underwent a dramatic reversal, the so-called *Torschlusspanik*, the fear of being shut out in the acquisition of colonies.<sup>20</sup> In a very short time Germany endeavored to acquire colonies in Africa and the Pacific. In a crudely engineered coup, Germany attempted to establish a puppet government in Samoa, ignoring the objections of the United States and Britain. The issue took a dangerous turn in March 1889, when three German warships, the *Adler*, the *Olga*, and the *Eber*, and three American warships, the *Trenton*, the *Nipsic*, and the *Vandalia*, squared off in Samoan waters ready to do battle.<sup>21</sup> This early glimpse of German-American hostility seems to have been judged to be premature even by

Providence, for on March 15th the 100 mph winds of a major typhoon destroyed all six ships,. But the fact could not be denied that in the military rivalries of the world, the United States could not remain uninvolved.

In the 1890s, the event with the most influence on military reform was the 1895 Sino-Japanese War. This war suggested that, as Army Commanding General John M. Schofield put it, the Atlantic Ocean was "little more serious an obstacle to the navies and transports of Europe than are the Japan and Yellow Seas to those of Japan."<sup>22</sup> Officers like Schofield saw distinct parallels between the unpreparedness of China and the United States on the one hand, and the power of smaller but mobilized states like Japan and Germany on the other. In 1897, Schofield warned that unless Americans were:

willing to prepare in advance for putting into the field at a moment's notice a very large and effective army, as well as to fortify all important seaports, they may as well make up their minds to submit, at least for a time, to whatever indignity any considerable naval power may see fit to inflict upon them.<sup>23</sup>

This kind of thinking influenced the United States in its next confrontation with an imperialist power. In the mid-1890s the American public focused its attention on the insurrection being waged by Cuban revolutionaries against their Spanish rulers. Thanks to the efforts of a number of energetic and articulate expatriates, Americans believed that the Cuban *insurrectos* deserved American support. In anticipation of likely hostilities, the Naval War College began to study the possibility of war with Spain. In 1894 a student, Lt.Cdr. Charles J. Train, completed a plan for war with Spain as a War College requirement, and in 1896 another student, Lt. William W. Kimball, wrote a paper entitled "War with Spain." When Secretary of the Navy John D. Long convened the Naval War Board to plan for the impending war, Lt. Kimball's plan, with only slight modifications, became America's first deliberate war plan. One of the most far reaching aspects of this plan was the provision for operations in the Philippines to prevent the

concentration of the Spanish navy in the waters around Cuba.<sup>24</sup> Thus, ironically, popular feelings against Spanish imperialism led the United States into a war which would transform it into an imperialist power.

When Admiral George Dewey sailed the U.S. Asiatic Squadron into Manila Bay, humiliating the Spanish fleet in the Philippines and practically ending Spanish rule in the Pacific, the United States had no intention of annexing the Philippines. It found, however, that other countries had designs on Spain's former empire. At this stage of the 19th century, the most aggressive of all the imperialist powers was Germany, and the Germans were not happy about the American seizure of Spanish possessions. The Kaiser said:

the scoundrels the Yankees want war . . . America plunders  
Spain's colonies, and England Portugal's.<sup>25</sup>

The United States was now faced with a dilemma. To leave the Philippines would abandon them to German domination. Further, internal strife, which the Spanish were trying to suppress when the war began, threatened to break out into open warfare. For these reasons, in August 1898, 8500 U.S. Army troops, under the command of General Wesley Merritt, were sent to the Philippines to complete its conquest and pacification. In reality, of course, the United States did not really take the Philippines from Spain so much as inherit an insurgency from the Spanish Army. Unlike the Cuban insurrectos, the Philippine insurgents had neither asked for nor welcomed U.S. assistance. The counterinsurgency would go on intermittently from 1898 to 1913. For the first time in its history the United States had to maintain an army in a theater of war many thousands of miles away, underscoring the need for a close working relationship between the Navy and the Army.

The legacy of the War with Spain was mixed. For the Navy, the battles of Manila and Santiago Bay were legitimate victories but, for the Army, the victories tasted a lot like defeats. On the battlefields in Cuba the U.S. Army had been as valorous as ever, but for every American soldier

killed by the enemy (381), more than four had died due to the negligence or incompetence of Army officers (2061). Clearly reform was in order, and the instrument of that reform was the newly appointed Secretary of War, Elihu Root. Root turned to Upton's work, and as a result, Upton's ideas were vindicated 20 years after his death. Chief among his recommendations had been the institution of a general staff and the creation of the "War Academy," which was implemented as the U.S. Army War College in November 1904. Now the Army and Navy had complementary structures for the joint study of strategic problems. At the War College dedication speech, Root encouraged the Army and Navy "never to forget your duty of coordination . . . this is the time to learn to serve together without friction."<sup>26</sup>

The final ingredient in tying together the Army and Navy's efforts was the 1903 creation of the Joint Army and Navy Board, the first standing interservice war planning association in American history. The board consisted of four principal officers of each service, with Admiral Dewey as chair until his death in 1917. The board's function was to issue broad guidelines for the defense of the United States, its possessions, and the Western Hemisphere. Detailed planning was the responsibility of the General Staff and the Navy Staffs, with most of the actual work done by the two war colleges.<sup>27</sup>

By this time, the danger of war with Germany was real. In the first three months of 1899, a combined Anglo-American force appeared in Samoan waters to overthrow a native government installed by the Germans. This force began to shell areas considered friendly to German rule, and later landed a force which suffered seven casualties in fighting German supported Samoans, the first blood shed in German-American hostilities.<sup>28</sup> Bad feelings began to grow between the two countries. The *Washington Post* editorialized that:

We know that by a thousand unmistakable signs and by the experience of years that in the German government the United States has a sleepless and insatiable enemy.<sup>29</sup>

On the German side, the confrontation between German and Anglo-American forces in Samoa was a major issue in the deliberations associated with the *Flottengesetz*, or Navy Law, of 1898. The *Flottengesetz* was influential in the formulation of German strategy in the years before World War I not only because it appropriated the money required to build a large, modern fleet, but also because it resulted in Kaiser Wilhelm's decision to include the German Admiralty in the Prussian cabinet.<sup>30</sup> The German navy was now the political and statutory equivalent of the army, which would have an ominous impact on the development of war plans.

In December 1899, Vizeadmiral Otto von Diederichs was appointed Chief of the German Admiralty Staff. Dewey and Diederichs were acquainted with each other. In May 1898, after the battle of Manila Bay, a squadron of ships from the German Pacific fleet steamed into Manila Bay on Dewey's heels. Thinking that the Germans were there to aid the Spanish, Dewey ordered one of the German ships, the *Irene*, to be detained. Diederichs, the German commander, arrived in person in June, and called upon Dewey to say that the Americans had no right to interfere with the *Irene*. Dewey lost his temper and told the German interpreter "Does Admiral von Diederichs think he commands here or do I? Tell your Admiral if he wants war I am ready."<sup>31</sup>

With the memory of this incident in his mind, Diederichs' first order of business was to plan for war with the United States.<sup>32</sup> The subject had been the theme of a number of projects assigned for study to officers of the naval staff in the form of *Winterarbeiten*, or winter projects, and the sum of these studies had concluded that "an effective blockade of the American coast with the means [provided by] the Naval Law of 1898" was not possible.<sup>33</sup> Diederichs recommended a doubling of the German fleet and a study of joint operations with an army expeditionary force for operations on the eastern seaboard of the United States. German naval officers studied the problems of landings conducted from bases (*Stützpunkt*) located in Canada, Cape Cod, and Puerto Rico to support operations oriented toward

the ultimate objectives of New York, Boston, and Charleston.<sup>34</sup>

On the Army side (one can imagine Scheibert's studies on American coastal defenses coming out of their filing cabinets), general staff officers concluded that the American army was pretty much a negligible quantity. The only combat seasoned troops were those on the frontier, and 10,000 of these troops would be tied down guarding against Indian uprisings,<sup>35</sup> (this was 10 years after Wounded Knee). The readiness of the militia was discounted as a *Spielerei*.<sup>36</sup> But Diederichs' enthusiasm about war with the United States was not matched by the Chief of the General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, who was more concerned about the military situation in Europe than an expedition to the Americas. As early as May 1900, Schlieffen was in consultation with the government on Germany's "strategic options" in the event of a two front war.<sup>37</sup> As the consequences of a European war were potentially far more grave than a war with the United States, Schlieffen's participation in the planning was vague and uninspired.<sup>38</sup> The plan, eventually labeled O.P III, was never really brought to an operational status, and its impact might have been negligible if it had not been for the zeal of a relatively junior army officer. In 1901, Freiherr von Edelsheim, a first lieutenant in the 2d Garde-Ulanen Regiment, published a study on German joint operations in the United States.<sup>39</sup> This book caused a furor. In March 1901 Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge wrote Vice President Theodore Roosevelt that a German landing in his constituency was "well within the range of possibilities, and the German emperor has moments when he is wild enough to do anything."<sup>40</sup>

### **The Response—The Color Plans.**

In April 1904, in response to a recommendation made by Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Adna R. Chaffee, Secretary of War William Howard Taft directed the Joint Army Navy Planning Board to:

agree upon a series of practical problems (taking them in the order of their assumed importance) which involve cooperation of the services, and for the execution of which in time of emergency the two staffs will be responsible.<sup>41</sup>

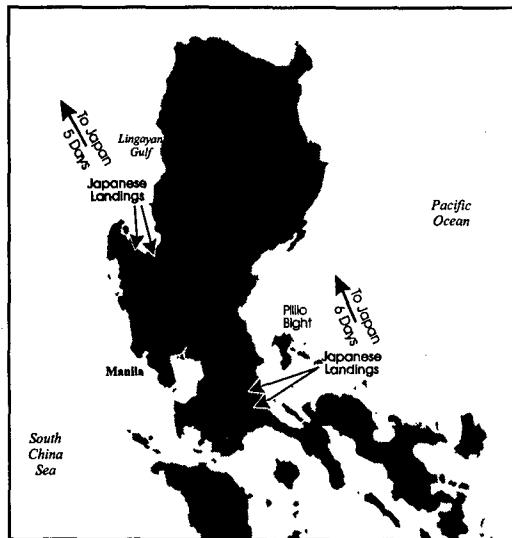
The Joint Board's solutions to these "practical problems" would become war plans signed by the two service secretaries. This was the first joint deliberate planning system in American history.

Admiral Dewey directed the chiefs of the two war colleges, Admiral Henry C. Taylor and General Tasker H. Bliss, to submit recommendations on how best to get the study underway.<sup>42</sup> Bliss submitted a 21-page paper, which shaped American war plans for the next 30 years. He assumed that the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine, which he pointed out at the time of the War with Spain was the "only" American foreign policy, would be the most probable cause of America's future wars. Significantly, Bliss reasoned that the acquisition of the Philippines expanded the Monroe Doctrine beyond the American hemisphere. He concluded that the major European powers would not likely attack the United States itself because diversion of military resources would weaken them in the face of continental rivalries; and that the real purpose of any violation of the Monroe Doctrine would be to seize American possessions in our hemisphere or in the Philippines.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, Bliss's paper recommended that the two services study the following problems in this order:

1. U.S. intervention in a South American country to assist the government in ousting a foreign power supporting insurgents;
2. U.S. at war against two continental European powers [one of which was sure to be Germany];
3. U.S. at war against a coalition of Britain and Canada; and,
4. U.S. intervention into Mexico "with another foreign complication" [presumably a European power collecting Mexican debt].<sup>44</sup>

The most virulent of all the potential enemies analyzed by the Joint Board was Germany. Accordingly, in 1913, these studies led to the formal plan BLACK, for war between the United States and Germany.

In 1905, the Russo-Japanese War added another country to the list of potential enemies of the United States—Japan. Plans for the defense of the Philippines had previously assumed a European enemy.<sup>45</sup> Beginning in 1906, particularly at the Naval War College, Japan became the chief adversary for all war planning and war games<sup>46</sup> (see Figure 2). These were no mere academic exercises. Diederichs' Japanese war planning counterpart was an Army officer named Giichi Tanaka, who in the 1906 draft of the Imperial Defense Policy included plans for war against the United States in the Philippines.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 2.**  
**1909 Estimate of Japanese Invasion of the Philippines.**

The problem of war with Japan was more difficult than war with Germany because the distance over which the Navy would have to project the fleet. In 1914, after 8 years of study, during which the United States provided for its Pacific interests by signing a number of treaties (Taft-

Katsura, Root-Takahira, and the Lansing-Ishii treaties<sup>48</sup>), the first edition of War Plan ORANGE for war with Japan emerged. Making matters worse, in 1902 Japan had signed an alliance with Britain, which meant that a war with Japan might involve the United States in a war with Britain as well. The United States would plan for war with Britain (Warplan RED) until 1921, the year when the Anglo-Japanese treaty was allowed to lapse.

In 1910, a third source of potential danger emerged in the American hemisphere. At the beginning of the century the Mexican government was in the hands of the dictator Porfirio Diaz, who ran Mexican affairs with an iron fist. Under his rule, however, the Mexican economy improved, railroads were built, mines and oil wells developed, and industry expanded. When he was overthrown as a result of the Revolution of 1910, Mexico was thrown into a period of instability and violence.

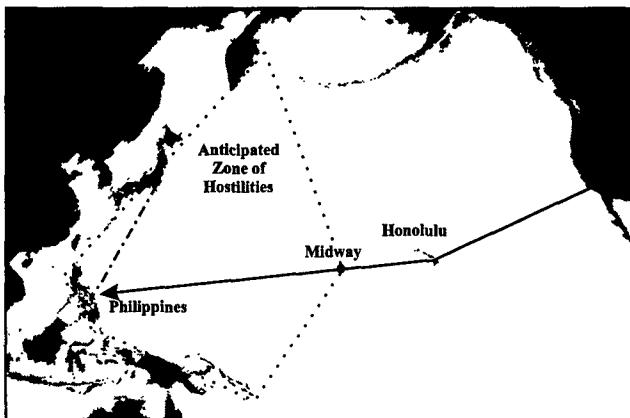
The violence in Mexico was in itself a peril to American interests, but the real danger of all the revolutionary unrest in the American hemisphere, of which Mexico was the prime example, was that hostile powers would emulate Louis Napoleon and exploit instability for the sake of advancing their own ambitions in the Americas. German and Japanese advisors were already in Mexico, either in covert or officially acknowledged status. Consequently, the measures which were taken to provide security against a threat from Mexico, and which eventually would be codified into Plan GREEN, were oriented as much against the Germans and Japanese as against any indigenous Mexican threat.

Thus, when hostilities broke out in Europe in 1914, the United States had already contemplated the possibility of war, and had developed plans for the employment of its military forces for the defense of its territory and the enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine, territorially expanded to encompass its new Pacific holdings. It remained an open question, however, as to whether the country possessed the means to achieve these objectives.

## Ways and Means.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries America's security rested on a strategic triad of capabilities—the Navy, the coastal defenses, and the mobile army.<sup>49</sup> Since both ORANGE and BLACK were primarily naval plans, American military preparations at the beginning of this century revolved around calculations of naval strength.

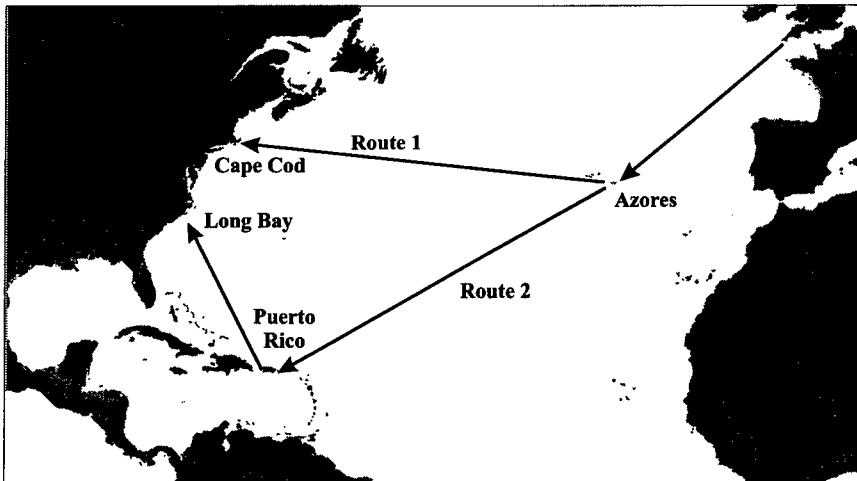
ORANGE was dominated by the logistical challenges of sustaining American forces over long sea lines of communication (see Figure 3). Naval planners believed that the Japanese would not be able to mount a challenge to the west coast as long as bases in Samoa, Hawaii, and Alaska remained in American hands, but the risk to the Philippines was much greater. The transit time for the U.S. fleet to get to the Philippines was estimated at 68 days (or over 100 days if the Panama Canal were neutralized), as opposed to the 8 days it would take the Japanese to cruise from Japan. This meant that the Army would have to defend the Philippines on its own for at least 60 days, an unlikely prospect without external reinforcement and support.<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 3.**  
**Plan ORANGE - Routes of the U.S. and Japanese Fleets.**

These relative advantages and disadvantages were reversed in Plan BLACK (see Figure 4). Like the Germans,

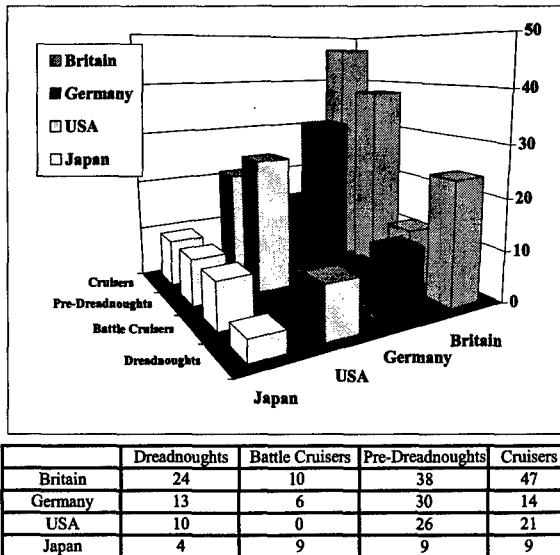
American naval planners recognized the importance of Caribbean coaling stations, especially after it became clear that Anglo-German animosity made an attack from Canada unlikely. It was here that the Navy intended to defeat the German fleet. While the image of a Trafalgar-like battle between the U.S. and German navies off the coast of Puerto Rico may seem far-fetched today, it was central to U.S. planning in the years leading up to 1917.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 4.**  
**Plan BLACK - Estimated German Invasion Routes.**

When these assessments were written, the U.S. fleet was ranked third in the world, behind that of Britain and Germany, and ahead of France and Japan<sup>52</sup> (see Figure 5). Further, the rates of naval growth were uneven. In the years 1905 to 1914, from the Russo Japanese War to the First World War, Japan had increased naval spending eleven-fold, German naval spending had tripled, while American naval spending had only doubled.<sup>53</sup> This implied that the first priority for U.S. readiness was the building of warships.

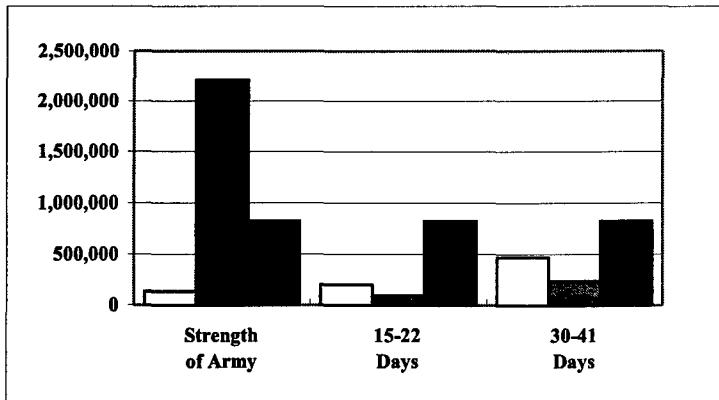
Regarding the preparedness of the American “mobile army,” since GREEN was principally intended to counter foreign intervention, and since both ORANGE and BLACK envisioned a war against a hostile expeditionary force



**Figure 5.**  
**Capital Ships, 1914.**

landed on American territory, calculations of required means were all based on an estimate of the capability of potential enemy nations to transport troops by sea. By way of illustration, Figure 6, compiled from a 1915 U.S. Army War College study, shows, at left, the total peacetime strength of the armies of the United States, Japan and Germany. In the center, a similar comparison shows the respective strength the three armies could generate after 15 to 22 days of war in the United States, the U.S. Army showing the effects of mobilization, and the Japanese and German armies showing the estimated size of expeditionary forces transported by ship. The far right comparison shows the situation after 30 to 41 days of war.<sup>54</sup> This line of analysis led even the most alarmist of commentators to call for levels of preparedness which fell far short of the actual First World War requirement.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, the authorized strength of the Army at that time was only 100,000 and, furthermore, the so-called "mobile" army was spread thin. The shortage of Army troops was aggravated by their mal-deployment in over 49 obsolete, Indian War vintage posts in 24 states.<sup>56</sup> This



**Figure 6.**

**Army War College Estimate, 1915, Showing the Estimated Strength of the U.S. Army Opposed by Expeditionary Forces.**

dispersion made it impossible for the Regular Army to convert itself into a modern European-style structure, and so while the division was recognized as the maneuver unit of the future, at war's beginning the U.S. Army had no divisions.<sup>57</sup> By one estimate, only 28,692 "mobile" troops were located within the continental limits of the United States.<sup>58</sup>

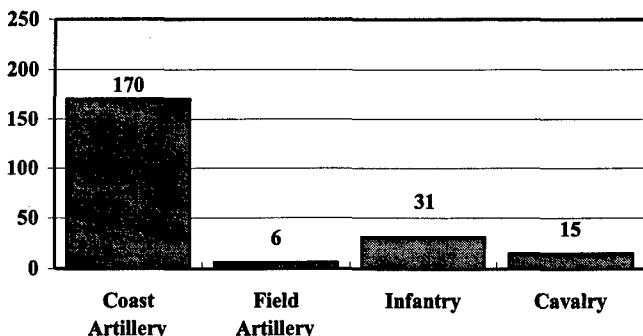
The third element of the nation's defense was the coast artillery. In the decade following the Civil War, America's coastal defenses were perhaps the single most neglected aspect of national defense. Then the 1879-81 war between Chile and a coalition of Bolivia and Peru rekindled interest in coastal defense. By the end of 1879, the modernized Chilean fleet had gained control of the sea, and in joint operations, in January 1881, a Chilean army force captured Lima, forcing Bolivia and Peru to cede mineral-rich provinces on the Pacific Ocean.<sup>59</sup> This war, called the War of the Pacific, was the first true naval conflict fought between ironclad fleets, and Peru's defeat suggested how inadequate

American coastal defenses had become since the end of the Civil War.<sup>60</sup> Highlighting this unpreparedness, the *New York Times* in 1882 reported that for the previous decade 80 percent of the Army's budget and 73 percent of its personnel had been employed against the Indians on the frontier,<sup>61</sup> leaving little for coastal defense. The coastal defense guns available consisted primarily of iron, muzzle-loaded pieces of Civil War vintage, inadequate for defense against the modern naval ordnance being developed in the 1880s.

In 1885, to remedy these deficiencies, the War Department convened the Joint Army-Navy Board on Fortifications and Other Defenses, or Endicott Board, named for the Secretary of War who served as its chairman. The report of this board, some 391 pages, shaped the development of American coastal ordnance for the next 30 years.

The Endicott board analyzed coastal defense requirements by studying the characteristics of modern warships such as displacement, draft, and armament.<sup>62</sup> Since warships which could not approach closer than 8,000 to 10,000 yards from shore could not reach land with their guns, the design of harbor defenses depended on the depth of the harbor.<sup>63</sup> For example, the harbor at San Francisco would admit deep draft vessels, but New Bedford's shallows would only admit lighter vessels. Therefore, a shallow draft harbor like New Bedford had no need for any heavy guns.

This type of analysis, updated with the appearance of each new class of warship and naval ordnance, governed the strategy, tactics, and acquisition policies of the coast artillery up to the First World War. The basic infrastructure was in place by 1903, consisting of 70 forts in 28 locations, mounting 79 8-inch guns, 110 10-inch guns, 87 12-inch guns, and 192 12-inch mortars<sup>64</sup> (see Figure 7). Gunnery increased until by 1913 100 percent hits could be scored against moving targets with a 12-inch gun at 7-9,000 yards, and 50 percent hits on battleship-sized targets at ranges up to 15,000 yards, which was considered sufficient to deter any naval attack. The U.S. Army led the world in the technology and tactics of coast artillery, and if this



**Figure 7.**  
**Regiments in the Regular U.S. Army - 1916.**

superiority was achieved at the expense of the mobile army, the country nonetheless felt secure.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Impact of War.**

At the time of President Wilson's first inauguration, in 1913, the country faced two crises in foreign affairs. The first was the murder of Francisco Madero, Diaz' successor in Mexico. Wilson, who regarded Madero as his ideological counterpart, became the uncompromising opponent of Madero's murderer, Victoriano Huerta.<sup>66</sup> At about the same time, the California state legislature passed the Alien Exclusion Act, which forbade Japanese nationals from owning or leasing land in that state. The Japanese government, which refused to believe that the Federal government could not overturn a state law, was incensed, and began to take advantage of what they saw as a convergence of interests with Mexico.<sup>67</sup> In the spring and summer of 1913, Japan supplied arms to the Huerta government. Then, in May, England recognized the Huerta government in order to secure a steady supply of Mexican oil to fuel the warships of the Royal Navy.<sup>68</sup>

These developments moved the Army-Navy Joint Planning Board to act. What the Board did was based upon the conclusion that the country could not defeat any hostile force landed on the west coast. One analysis read:

If 200,000 men of any first class hostile power should be landed on our Pacific Coast, we should have no course but to hand over to a foreign nation the rich empire west of the Rockies, with its cities, its harbors, and the wealth of its valleys and mountains.<sup>69</sup>

In the summer of 1913 the Joint Board dispatched a number of warships to Manila and the Pacific Fleet to Hawaii,<sup>70</sup> thus following the example of the Navy Board in 1898, which began the deployment of the fleet in advance of a declaration of war or of a Presidential order. Wilson, however, was less inclined to provoke a war than McKinley. He countermanded the order and disbanded the Joint Board.<sup>71</sup> The United States would not be like the European powers in letting military planning requirements drive the decision to wage war.

The outbreak of the European war in the summer of 1914 initially seemed to confirm American assumptions that the rivalry among the European powers would keep them so preoccupied that none of them would be able to pose any threat in the Americas. Soon, however, events were to shake the nation from its pre-war complacency. On December 8th, 1914, the British 12-inch cruisers *Invincible* and *Inflexible* sank the German 8.3-inch cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* off the Falkland Islands. The engagement began at 16,500 yards. Then, on January 24th, 1915, the British 13.5-inch battle cruisers *Lion* and *Tiger* sank the German 8.3-inch cruiser *Blücher* and severely damaged the 11-inch cruiser *Seydlitz* at ranges between 17,000 and 20,000 yards.<sup>72</sup> These extremely long-range engagements invalidated the American assumptions about the ranges of naval ordnance, and brought into question the adequacy of nation's coastal defenses.<sup>73</sup>

In November 1914, the Japanese embarked on a series of campaigns in Asia and the Pacific, ostensibly in support of their British allies, but which in reality were designed to take advantage of Germany's predicament to extend Japan's empire. The German port of Tsingtao, as well as the Marshalls, the Caroline, and the Mariana Islands were captured, which worsened the already precarious strategic situation in the Philippines.

The situation on the sea lanes also put Americans and American interests at risk. The German High Seas Fleet, bottled up in the North Sea, was little danger, but the German submarine force became the major peril on the high seas, for which the assumptions of Plan BLACK made no provision.

But where all of the dangers of war seemed to converge with the most immediate impact was in Mexico. In December 1914, the captain of a Japanese warship visited Mexico City.<sup>74</sup> Japan was aggrieved at the United States and had been preparing for war for over 3 years.<sup>75</sup> In April 1915, the Japanese battle cruiser *Asama* was detected maneuvering off the coast of Baja California.<sup>76</sup> The Hearst press, which had so effectively worked Americans into a war fever in 1898, screamed that the Japanese had been using naval bases in Baja California.<sup>77</sup>

In April 1915, the U.S. Government learned of a German plan to put Huerta, who was in exile, back in power.<sup>78</sup> At this stage of the war, Germany had already begun intrigues to tie the United States down in its hemisphere and prevent it from intervening in Europe. This plot, coming on the heels of the *Lusitania* crisis, almost brought the United States into the war. It was clear that German attempts to involve the United States in a war with Mexico would continue, and would become the deciding factor regarding U.S. policy. As Secretary of State Lansing put it, "Our possible relations with Germany must be our first consideration, and our intercourse with Mexico must be regulated accordingly."<sup>79</sup>

A covert operation took Huerta out of the picture, and Germany's attention turned to Pancho Villa, the next beneficiary of German support. In January 1916, a German-armed band of Villistas raided a group of American mining engineers in San Ysabel, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. Americans called for revenge for the "massacre at San Ysabel." The next crisis, Villa's March 1916 raid on Columbus, New Mexico, produced intelligence to suggest that the threat from Mexico was more than bandit gangs. Among the dead of the Villista raiders was a courier carrying dispatches from Villa to Emiliano Zapata, fighting

in the southern part of Mexico. These dispatches suggested a union of the two revolutionaries "to join in a concentrated attack upon the United States," and informing Zapata that he had "sent couriers to all states to incite the population against the Americans . . . the common enemies of the Mexicans."<sup>80</sup> This was the impetus for the deployment of Pershing's punitive expedition in accordance with Plan GREEN.

One of the more bizarre aspects of the Mexican campaign was the discovery in June 1916 of the so-called "Plan of San Diego," a Huertista scheme to promulgate revolution among the Mexican, Indian, and African American populations in the states of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and California. The success of the revolution in these states was expected to spread to six more southern states, where Jim Crow laws would motivate African Americans to keep a long-term insurgency alive.<sup>81</sup> The evidence is inconclusive as to the degree that the Plan of San Diego was official policy in either the Huerta or Carranza governments, but the American military took it seriously, and started to prepare for full-blown war with Mexico.<sup>82</sup> Wilson's more insightful response was to prepare for war with the source of the nation's problems, that is against Germany itself. Accordingly, on January 12th, 1917, Wilson told Secretary Baker to withdraw the expedition, in time for the intercept of the Zimmerman telegram in February. In this regard, Wilson was right and the military wrong, for had the United States gone to war with Mexico, it would have played right into German hands.<sup>83</sup>

By 1917, the contingencies envisioned by ORANGE and BLACK were extremely unlikely—the German fleet was bottled up in the North Sea, and the Japanese fleet was far away from home waters cooperating with Allied navies in the Mediterranean—yet, the United States was not secure. It could not protect its maritime commerce, it had to contend with foreign instigated violence on its southern frontier, and it had to face the prospect of insurrection on its own territory. Further, the situation in Europe was now a factor.

If the Germans won, which in 1917 was a strong possibility, they would feel emboldened enough to expand their influence into the Americas. If the stalemate continued, and the European armies ground each other to powder, then the way would be open for an ever more aggressive Japan. As an estimate prepared by one of President Wilson's military advisors (LTC Henry T. Allen) concluded, without U.S. involvement none of the principal nations involved in the European war could be destroyed, meaning that the war could not "reconcile the victors to the vanquished" and that postwar Europe could not escape its troublesome nature. In the Far East, the "terrible catastrophe" that had overcome the Western powers would weaken "the white races" to the point that "the yellow races will have their innings."<sup>84</sup>

At this point, American strategy underwent a profound and sudden change. Freedom of the sea lanes, and stability in the American republics could not be achieved by hemispheric defense, but only by the deployment of an expeditionary force large enough to remove the hostile regime. The quick and complete defeat of Imperial Germany, heretofore believed to be of no interest to the United States, was now recognized as essential to American security. Such thinking did not immediately catch on. At one point in April 1917, for example, a U.S. senator buttoned-holed an officer of the General Staff and asked with incredulity, "Good Lord! You're not going to send soldiers over there, are you?"<sup>85</sup>

Army and Navy planners adapted no better than the Senate. While there were aspects of Plan BLACK which were implemented (for example, Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels recounts that the seizure of German and Austrian ships interred in American ports was a provision of BLACK), existing plans were of little value for the dispatch of American forces to Europe.. Under immense pressures of time, the War Department prepared estimates for the new contingency. These envisioned invading Bulgaria through Greece, and of a landing in the rear of the German armies in France through an alliance with the Netherlands.<sup>86</sup> None of these concepts was, of course, fit for anything other than the

trash, and the time wasted on them actually contributed to the delay of American intervention.

No realistic planning was undertaken until the designated commander of the American Expeditionary Force, General Pershing, arrived in Europe to survey the requirement. As Pershing bitterly noted:

when the Acting Chief of Staff (Bliss) went to look in the secret files where the plans to meet the situation that confronted us should have been found, the pigeon hole was empty. In other words, the War Department was face to face with the question of sending an army to Europe, and the General Staff had never considered such a thing.<sup>87</sup>

A later comment of Pershing's indicates the strain on Army-Navy relations the requirements of the Western Front would cause. Pershing's estimate that the AEF would number at least 2,000,000 men and would consume over 50,000 tons of freight per day was regarded by Admiral William Sims, the commander of U.S. Naval forces in Europe, as "very much an exaggeration or else as just an army joke."<sup>88</sup>

Once planning got underway in Pershing's headquarters, it assumed the broad outlines of the modern American deliberate planning process, that is, with the theater commander-in-chief outlining requirements, the Army Chief of Staff making provision to provide the forces required, and the Chief of Naval Operations conducting the strategic deployment of those forces. This was the dawn of 20th century American military history.

## Conclusion.

Today, the early efforts of the Joint Planning Board appear quaint. It is amusing to see how wrong many of their operational assessments were. But on the big question, the need of the United States to prepare for war, they were dead right. That is the lesson that they can teach, that the nation's security and survival depend so heavily on a small

group of professionals, contemplating and making provision for the worst case.

As the United States nears the turn of the next century, American strategic attitudes are in many ways analogous to those we faced at the end of the 19th century. It seems modern to argue that American security would most efficiently be maintained through economic strength, that the dangers of war have subsided, and that technology will provide an easy solution to the nation's strategic needs. In reality, all these arguments are but echoes of the American strategic debate at the turn of the last century.

The United States was the economic superpower of the late 19th century, but in certain countries American wealth generated more envy than respect. No use of the economic instrument of power could deter the leaders of those countries who wished ill to the United States, and so against their very instincts Americans found they had to prepare for war.

The notion that the United States can be threatened from at least two different quarters is currently being questioned, in the hope of realizing a reduction of the defense spending necessary to respond to two major regional contingencies. In reality, however, the danger of two or more regional contingencies has been the rule in the history of American strategy, not the exception. The experiences of the late 19th and early 20th centuries strongly suggest that countries who aspire to take advantage of the United States will overcome regional rivalries and ideological differences to cooperate with each other, and nothing in the ensuing century suggests that that has changed.

Finally, some suggest that American security on the eve of the 21st century would best be provided for by what amounts to a technological upgrade to our 19th century triad of the Navy, the coast artillery, and the mobile army, with a strategic missile defense capability as the modern analog to the coast artillery. A strategic defense system might prove to be feasible, and some components of it might

be prudent to field. If such a system is purchased at the expense of the "mobile" conventional forces, however, the United States might have to relearn the lesson of 1917, that is that the nation's most sure defense is the capability to deploy an expeditionary force to a foreign shore and destroy a hostile regime.

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